

**CITY OF BRIDGEPORT
EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING
JUNE 13, 2012**

ATTENDANCE: Denese Taylor-Moye, Co-Chair; Andre Baker; Manuel Ayala; Richard Bonney; Angel dePara

ALSO: Morgan Barth, Principal, Achievement First Bridgeport Academy Middle School; Ken Paul, V.P. of Development, Achievement First.

CALL TO ORDER

Council Member Taylor-Moye called the meeting to order at 6:31 p.m.

Mr. Morgan Barth, Principal of Achievement First Bridgeport Academy Middle School, and Mr. Ken Paul, Vice-President of Development for Achievement First introduced themselves to the committee. Mr. Paul added that he has been involved in the Bridgeport community serving as Board Chair for Habitat for Humanity and also Bridgeport Bluefish among others.

Chair Taylor-Moye asked them how they thought their school was doing, and what are some of their accomplishments. Mr. Barth said his school is doing very well, and data is telling them they are in a very good place. The children, in classes of 20-25 students, work very hard, even at this time of year with the end of the school year coming soon. This is part of the school culture, and the administration has worked very hard with the students, teachers and parents to build a culture where students and teachers come to school every day, have fun, but work very hard to achieve their goals. They are teaching the students that it takes a lot of hard work, focus and grit to 'climb the mountain to college'. The end of the school year is a time for some significant end of year trips available to students who have earned the chance to go. 2/3 of the 8th grade class was in Washington, DC, the 5th grade enjoyed a trip to Boston and the 7th grade went to a camp in northwestern CT. When students work hard through the school year they earn Scholar Dollars, which they can use to participate in the end of the year trips. All of this supports very strong academic programs.

Academic results are measured in a number of ways, including their state scores, as matched against other districts. Most students at Achievement First Middle School start 5th grade reading at a 2nd grade reading level. The programs spend most of 5th & 6th grade catching up and by 8th grade 60% of their students are reading at goal level, compared to 0% reading at goal level in 5th grade. This prepares them for a rigorous high school program. This is twice as good as the rest of the school district. Their goal is to get 100% of their 8th graders reading at goal level, and they feel they are making great progress towards that goal.

Mr. Paul said the middle school has been in existence for 5 years now, and they have added an elementary school, Garfield School, which currently houses kindergarten and 1st grade. They typically grow the schools one grade at a time. Next year they will admit another 90 students to the program, which will then be K, 1st and 2nd grade. Eventually when that is a full K-4th grade the students will move from the elementary to the middle school. He added that they recently learned the State of CT has renewed their Charter for another 5 years.

Mr. Baker asked how many students per class, and how are they admitted. Mr. Barth said typically there are 85 per grade. Admittance is through a blind lottery process. They draw from 14 schools located on the East Side, East End and P.T. Barnum housing neighborhood and south end, which encompass the lowest performing schools in the district. This process is a little different from other cities where Achievement First has charter schools, such as New Haven Hartford and Brooklyn, NY. It is a blind lottery, with the exception of sibling preference. Students are admitted in Kindergarten and 5th grade, with a few openings in 1st and 6th grade. Once the elementary school is fully grown students will enter in Kindergarten only.

Mr. Baker asked what criteria a student must meet to be eligible. Mr. Barth said it is strictly by eligible school district. For the coming year they had approximately 170 spots available, split between Kindergarten and 5th grade, with a total of 891 applicants. Mr. Baker asked how much it cost to educate each student. Mr. Barth said their goal is to spend the same as the local district, which is \$12,500. They are currently funded, from the State of CT, at \$9,400. They close the \$3,000 per student gap through private fundraising. They also do not receive any money for facilities, with those funds raised privately as well. Mr. Baker asked who their private funders are. Mr. Paul said the Fairfield County Community Foundation, the Cohen Family Foundation, Mr. Andy Boas and family. He said their desire is to be funded just like any other public school, and this is not a sustainable operation until it is fully funded by the State Board of Education.

Councilman Richard Bonney joined the meeting at 6:50 p.m. and was given a brief summary of Achievement First.

Chair Taylor-Moye asked if the curriculum is similar to the district public schools and also what services do you offer to special education children. Mr. Barth said yes, they do serve special need students, their IEP (Individualized Education Plan) follows the student to whatever school they attend. 10-11% of their students have an IEP. The District number is 12%. They employ a “whatever it takes” approach to meeting their needs. Additionally, extra help is offered to children if needed, even if they do not have an IEP.

Their curriculum looks pretty much the same as the district in that they offer all of the same classes. One of their programs that is significantly different is they have a longer school day. School goes from 7:15 a.m. – 4 p.m., with an afterschool program offered until 5 o’clock. On Friday school is over at 1 p.m., and the afternoon is used for teacher development and planning. This is for all grades, K – 2nd, and 5-8. The main reason is because they give their students a triple dose of reading instruction to bring them up to goal level. There is also an overall

atmosphere of high expectations, and the kids know that they need to work really, really hard to be college ready. Mr. Paul said in lower performing urban areas children are often 2-3 grade levels behind and this is what is necessary to bring them up to level. He added that no one will thrive in a high performing environment unless it is a joyful place, which these schools are. They work hard and they play hard. Ms. Taylor-Moye asked if the little ones can do this without a nap. Mr. Barth said there is a rule of thumb that teachers use, age + seven, gives you the number of minutes a student can go without a break or change. He added all students adjust.

Mr. Paul extended an invitation to the committee to visit either of the schools at any point in time. Mr. Bonney asked what process they used to determine where they would put their schools. Mr. Paul responded saying that the areas to be served were discussed with Board of Education and other city officials. They started out with students from the East End and East Side, and after 2 years added the south end and west side. As their schools grew they purchased Barnum School and Garfield School where they still reside today. They are open minded to going into other neighborhoods within the city, and they understand there is a lot of interest in these areas. Mr. Bonney said his concern is that if you are not a resident of the target areas you cannot attend. Mr. Paul said that is a good point and is not their choice. There are 21,000 school children in Bridgeport, and they are serving 600 presently.

Mr. Baker asked what agreement they have with the Bridgeport Board of Education. Mr. Barth said the Charter is the legal document allowing them to operate a public school in Bridgeport. Written in to the Charter are requirements for a very thorough financial audit, and school performance measurements. Mr. Baker asked how they could be expanded. Mr. Paul said expansion can come with a revised Memorandum of Understanding with the City of Bridgeport Board of Education. They are accountable to the State Board of Education, but have had a very good working relationship with the City BOE, and if the City said they would want them to expand they would strong consider their suggestions. Mr. Baker asked if they received any money from the City. Mr. Barth said the City is the recipient of state and federal money that is tagged for special education and First Achievement receives a proportion of that money to serve their eligible students. They also utilize the bussing service used by the City. Mr. Paul said during initial discussions there was going to be a \$1,000 per student supplement. That did not happen. Hartford supplies Achievement First with a school building, services and utilities, and at the K-8 level \$500/per student.

Mr. Baker asked about nutrition funding. Mr. Barth said that 90% of their students qualify for free meals, and the school takes advantage of the same federal programs as the City. They provide free breakfast and lunch to all students. Mr. Baker asked if there was an annual report available. Mr. Paul said they do file a yearly report to the state and they can provide a copy.

Ms. Taylor-Moye asked how much money is provided by the City for Special Ed students. Mr. Barth said they have recently renegotiated the funding from the City. They currently receive \$70,000/year which does not nearly cover the costs. The new formula is for every 20 Special Ed students they serve, the City will fund 1 Special Ed teacher. Their goal is to not spend more than

the Public School spends in this area, because they try to demonstrate that, with the same kinds of students, and with less money, they are achieving better results.

Achievement First is 14 years old with 20 schools in New Haven, Hartford, Brooklyn and Bridgeport. From the beginning they were getting good academic results. They have received a number of criticisms from different places, such as how could these kids do so well, they must be cheating on tests which is not true. Then it was implied that the schools were hand picking the best students, also not true. They look like the same kids but without the special education students, also not true, and that you have kids with overly involved parents, also not true. The reason they are able to provide results is that they have high expectations, work very hard, longer school days, and they make no excuses for their kids. Mr. Paul said that is why they purposely don't spend more money per student so not to use that as the reason for better results.

Mr. DePara asked if there was ever a question of easier curriculum than the other schools. Mr. Barth said their students take the same Mastery Tests as all other students in the state. Mr. Bonney commented on Hartford offering more because any child can attend their charter school. Mr. Paul said that is true, however Achievement First is not the only charter school in the city, and the other schools are open to any Bridgeport student.

Ms. Taylor-Moye asked if they had summer school, etc. Mr. Barth said they do not have a summer school program, however they start school mid-August, so it is a longer school year. Ms. Taylor-Moye asked if there is mandated parent participation. Mr. Barth said that they have a large number of engaged parents, but it is not mandatory participation. She asked if they have a PAC board. Mr. Barth said no, but they have a very active group of parents supporting the school. Ms. Taylor-Moye asked if they had an IEP student that was not equipped to be there, how do they refer them elsewhere i.e. ACES, CES, Reach. Mr. Barth said they have a lot of kids with learning and behavioral disabilities. A large number of students arrive, not having succeeded elsewhere, and make progress in their school, with some getting decertified in Special Ed. They address behavioral issues with lots of intervention and structure. When they do have PPT meetings there is a representative from the Board of Ed present as part of the committee. There are no Special Ed classrooms. Ms. Taylor-Moye asked who pays for a student that needs to be referred out to a special program. Mr. Barth said it is the Districts responsibility.

Mr. Barth said there are 70 8th grade students graduating from the middle school this year, most of which have chosen to stay with Achievement First and will be going to Amistad Academy in New Haven. Amistad Academy is graduating their 3rd Senior Class with 100% attending 4 year college programs.

The committee thanked Mr. Barth and Mr. Paul for coming to the meeting and sharing their experience and knowledge of Achievement First schools in Bridgeport.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

****COUNCIL MEMBER BONNEY MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF APRIL 16, 2012 MEETING.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER AYALA SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

ADJOURNMENT

**** COUNCIL MEMBER AYALA MOVED TO ADJOURN.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER BONNEY SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 7:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Jill Kuzmich
Telesco Secretarial Services